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Care and cruelty in Chios: the 'refugee crisis' and the limits of Europeⁱ

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Abstract:

Focusing on Chios, at the start of 2016, and my experience there as a volunteer, this paper aims to understand the forms of violence that unfolded in that location and considers what they mean for the social and political transformation of Europe. Violence takes many forms but in this paper I focus on cruelty – specifically, modern, colonial and racial acts of excessive violence committed without regard for the victim. Secondly, the paper develops a feminist and postcolonial analysis of care. This analysis is concerned with acts of empathy, responsibility and relation that acted as correctives to cruelty. The paper shows how cruelty and care are intertwined and how their quotidian workings reveal wider patterns of violence and responsibility. However, rather than reiterate that care is ensnared in cruelty, this paper defends care's autonomy, vitality and centrality to an alternative humanist ethics.

Key words:

Refugee crisis; care; cruelty; Chios; Europe; race

From the end of 2015, the ‘refugee crisis’ and the cruelty that accompanied it became mainstream news. Across Europe, borders were closed. In Calais, Hungary and on the Greek-Macedonian border severe violence against refugees was documented. In Brussels, an EU-Turkey deal was penned and long standing asylum policy seemingly contravened. We saw the construction of refugee detention centres, abandoned children and Britain’s commitment to offer nothing beyond the most minimal sanctuary to people it had actively displaced.

‘Crisis’ connotes novelty or brevity but what is happening is neither new nor will end soon. What has come to Europe’s attention from the end of 2015 is the only the most recent phase of forced human displacement. In 2014, UNHCR (the UN body responsible for refugees) had reported that the world’s forcibly displaced population stood at 56.5 million people – the largest since records began (UNHCR 2015). This was 19 million more than a decade earlier. Although 86 per cent live in the Global South, the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have driven increasing numbers to Spain, Italy and Greece. Here, at the southern limits of Europe, they were joined by other refugees – people forcibly displaced from their homes by free market trade agreements, land appropriation, ecological decline and by the wars in Somalia and the Ukraine.ⁱⁱ

Those arriving in Europe, they encountered another crisis not of their making. Between 2007 and 2008, the financial crisis had led to a downturn in European fortunes, and against prevailing economic advice austerity had been rolled out (Krugman 2015). The European Commission, European Central Bank, Britain, and southern European countries informed their populations they would have to make do with less – less welfare and fewer public services.

In Greece, of which Chios is part, the financial crisis had an even heavier toll. There, austerity was rapid and deeply felt. Led by Germany, a group of actors (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Eurogroup) imposed a series of financial bailouts under strict austerity conditions. Under those conditions, public spending was slashed and the economy stagnated. Unemployment rose to 25% and nearly half the Greek population fell below the poverty line (European Commission 2018). This was compounded by the loss of income from tourism. Holidaymakers across Europe were travelling less, and Greece’s tourist destinations, such as Chios, felt it.

In this economic and social context, Chios, along with neighbouring islands Samos and Lesbos, became among the largest recipients of refugees in Europe. Geographically, politically and economically at the limits of Europe, Chios became a frontier for human displacement as it also became the testing grounds for aggressive neoliberal economic reforms. These activities were not marginal to the continent; rather they defined its centre. As Balibar had earlier noted, if Europe is defined by its political problems, “Greece is one of its centers, not because of the mythical origins of our civilization... but because of the current problems concentrated there” (2004, 2).

Focusing on Chios at the start of 2016 and my experience as a volunteer in that location, this paper addresses a small part of this story, and it does so with two specific purposes.ⁱⁱⁱ Firstly, in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’, the paper aims to understand the forms of violence that unfolded in that location and considers what they mean for the social and political transformation of Europe. Violence can take many forms but in this paper I specifically focus on cruelty – acts of excessive violence committed without regard for the victim. This was the form of violence most evident on Chios.

Secondly, the paper develops an analysis of care. This analysis is concerned with acts of empathy, responsibility and relation that acted as correctives to cruelty. The paper shows how cruelty and care were intertwined and how these quotidian workings revealed wider patterns of violence and responsibility unravelling at the time. However, rather than reiterate that care is ensnared in cruelty, this paper defends care’s autonomy, vitality and centrality to an alternative humanist ethics.

To assist in this discussion of care and cruelty, the paper has been organised in accordance with the refugees’ movement through the island. Whereas a more scientifically derived organisation might separate out interlocking factors into discrete conceptual categories, this paper’s intention is to show how narratives, histories, bureaucracies, practices, geographies and legislation intersected unevenly across the island, and to evaluate the presence of care and cruelty therein.

Cruelty and care

To open up the necessary analytic angles for this paper, I start by developing the concepts of cruelty and care.

Cruelty is a form of violence that causes excessive harm or pain to another, for which the perpetrator feels no culpability. This could be the pain caused by a torturer or by a face-less bureaucracy, and in this sense cruelty can be wilful at the same time as it is banal, routinized and inscribed into everyday practices. In Chios, it predominantly took the later form and was found in the interlinked narratives, histories, practices, bureaucracy, legislation, and spatial arrangement of the island.

The particular characteristics of these routinized cruelties are products of the development of modern Europe and its technologies and methods for controlling the human condition (Foucault 1977). In seeming contradiction, this modern formation of cruelty has run alongside the development of liberal human rights. Liberal human rights have as a central imperative the elimination of cruelty. So, cruelty has been institutionalised alongside a moral and ethical commitment to non-cruelty (Asad 2003, 109).

Within this, what has been considered, or not, to be cruel has been a matter of social definition. In the history of modern and colonial Europe, cruel behaviour has been deemed normal, necessary and even beneficial when it is socially sanctioned (Montaigne 1993 (1580)). Whether it be the murderous judgements about the relative closeness of people to God made by the Spanish and Portuguese invaders of the Americas, the extent to which you are permitted to starve to death in the colonies, the poisoning of your waterways, or sterilisation, who or who cannot be treated cruelly has always been determined by your closeness to Europe's ideal moral subject, and that distance has overwhelmingly been established by racism.

These racially determined cruelties have frequently taken on a colonial formation. While the systems of cruelty that operate within Europe today might not be seen as colonial – supposing that Europe cannot colonize itself – we should be clear that they are precisely that. It is in fact well documented that the forms of racial cruelty developed to such destructive ends in Europe in the 1940s, were pioneered in the colonies. There they acquired distinctively modern features corresponding with the management, surveillance

and categorisation of people, as they accrued colonial and racial forms of spatial and human arrangement (Cesaire 1972, 36). Powerfully amplified by Nazism and Stalinism but inherent to all modern European societies, the carnivalesque of medieval violence was then incorporated into modern Europe alongside these colonial and racial systems of order and control. This is what Bhabha, drawing on Walter Benjamin, refers to as the barbarism of modernity (Bhabha 2008).

While the formation of Europe has ensured many of these racial, colonial and modern cruelties are routinized in social and political life, those that stretch social acceptability require special discursive and legislative framings (Schmitt 2008). In Chios, this occurred through the extraordinary measures evoked by the European Council, measures which drew historical parallels with a state of siege – one form of the state of exception (European Council 2016). The mass killing of refugees at sea and the construction of detention facilities were not then part of the usual operation of life and death on the island. While a normal civilian constitution remained (unlike a state of emergency), legislation expanded to sanction unusual cruelties. Here, the military started to play a more significant role, alongside the police, in the securitisation of the island, raising internal and external fortifications.

Those formations of cruelty were intertwined with care. In humanitarian literature, care is often developed through a Foucauldian framework which emphasises its entrapment in institutionalised cruelty. Texts in this field address the blurred distinction between the hand that cares (the humanitarian world) and the hand that strikes (the police and military), noting the functional relationship of both in the management of undesirable people (Agier 2011, 5; Fassin 2005, 382). These texts are useful because they help think through the located intensities of cruelty and care, and what they mean, but they are also limited in that care is always captured in the tentacles of modern management.

Feminist and postcolonial scholarship is also concerned with how care can be contradictory. Here, care is intertwined with cruelty but is not reduced to it. Rather, it acts as a corrective sometimes maintaining humanity within systems of crushing racialised cruelty (Robinson 1997; Lawson 2007; Mooten 2015). Whereas cruelty divides and distances through colonial imperative and along racial lines, care seeks relation and proximity. As neoliberal cruelty privatises and outsources suffering, care acts publicly and reflexively to foment solidarity.

However, in dominant European culture, it has not been care but civility, rationality, fairness and equality that have been privileged in the weighing of morality and justice. These have been bound to the development of the autonomous liberal self, and to men as the prime actors within the public sphere. As these modes of morality have been privileged, feminine ethics have been relegated to the private (Gilligan 1982). So whereas human morality has been seen to progress through public dialogue, justice and the rules for citizens and governments, private acts of love and responsibility have been dismissed. It is for this reason that civility, rather than care, has been posited as the counterpoint to cruelty because civility corresponds to a set of rules for individuals' moral and public conduct, and to the duties required of citizens in democracy. So while there is an injunction that modern societies (also liberal ones) should not treat people with cruelty, and should be civil, there has been no particular imperative for care or indeed broad consideration of what that might mean (Robinson 1997).

This is not to say that notions of fairness, equality and redistribution have not resulted in systems we might think of as caring. Indeed they have, and these understandings of care informed the approaches of many international volunteers on Chios. The welfare state in Britain is a good example of a system we think of as caring. But the difference between welfarist and feminist notions of care is that in welfare, care is done *to* you and indeed *to* certain people defined as in need of care: "the infirm, the young/elderly, the dependent, the flawed—ignoring the fact that we, all of us, give and need care" (Lawson 2007, 3). Under Conservative neoliberalism, this categorisation of the needy persists, but welfare is argued to cause dependency and so instead of the state, individuals and communities are morally mandated to look after their own and are thereby also made responsible for any failure that follows.

Another system we think of as caring is humanitarianism. In the post-WWII period, this extends welfarism from the national to the international. In so doing, welfarism becomes intertwined with benevolent colonialism often through the figure of the saviour. The saviour identifies a victim (in Chios, the refugee). This victim is seen to be vulnerable, often childlike, and lacking in agency. The saviour (the international volunteer) then takes on the mantle of rescuing the victim, but does so on their own terms, thus enacting the other side of the colonial binary – a fulfilment of maturity, agency and civility (Mutua 2001; Narayan 1995).

These forms of care were evident in Chios but so too were acts of care that were feminist and postcolonial in character. These were less responsibility *for* others (a welfarist, patriarchal and/or colonial model) than responsibility *to* others; they sought not a “bond of continuing dependence” but a “dynamic of interdependence” between supposed strangers (Gilligan 1982, 149). Threaded through welfarism and benevolent colonialism was then a dynamic of interdependence which deconstructed care as the privileged property of the nuclear family and the nation. In these acts, care worked to de-privatize responsibility, and to foster mutuality and solidarity beyond the boundaries of race and nation. In that sense, care on Chios was also located in a wider set of postcolonial and feminist caring relationships of which maids, nannies, nurses, extended communities and solidarity networks have long since been part (Carby 1987; Gunaratnam 2013; Lowe 2015).

This ethics of care did not proceed in accordance with a set of predefined social and moral dispositions but rather was grounded, reflexive and worked out through social practices. As I will discuss below, the depth of reflexive practice was limited, but nonetheless some deconstruction of cultural assumptions, some consideration of an-Other’s knowledge, and some attention to the power of the caregiver over the recipients of care, did occur. In this sense, the caring space was also a learning space that unmade and disrupted some of the cruelties that surrounded it (Lawson 2007, 7; Mooten 2015, 8; Spivak 2000; Spivak and Harasym 1990).

Crossings

My partner and I arrived on Chios at the end of January 2016. Our journey, a short flight from Athens, contrasted sharply with the crossings many refugees had already made from the Turkish port of Çeşme. Our quick and comfortable arrival seemed of gross ease compared to the slow and dangerous voyage undertaken by groups of 70 people crowded into small rubber dinghies, propelled by five horsepower motors across the winter sea.



Figure 1: View of the journey across the Aegean crossing from Chios to Çeşme

That combination of factors was deadly and after only a few days on the island more than two hundred people had drowned – a small proportion of total sea deaths, a figure estimated to be in the tens of thousands (United Nations 2017). The precarity of life under these conditions made the rhythms of arrival contingent on the weather. When the sea was rough, few boats would come, but when it was calm hundreds of people arrived per day. Carrying terror and relief, they did not stay long. Most moved on after 48 hours, continuing their journey into the freezing Balkans and onto Germany. Among them were Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians; a smaller number of Iranians and Iraqi Kurds; men and women, children and elders. All were cold, wet, tired and hungry.

As the refugees started to arrive in 2015, the Chios Solidarity Collective was formed – a group of left leaning locals collectivised in response to the unfolding situation. This group quickly established an infrastructure of care, collecting clothing donations from local residents, and feeding 200-300 people twice daily – first from an old army canteen (see figure 2), and then from an improvised kitchen. This nourishment was supplemented by a porridge breakfast, prepared and handed out by a group of Swiss Anarchists who had set up a squat on the port wall. This became a full time occupation for many of these residents, who would otherwise have been preparing their bars, shops and stalls for the start of the tourist season.



Figure 2: Army Canteen

Narratives

As they landed on the coast, local narratives and histories shaped the humanity and inhumanity^{iv} of refugees. A local wholesaler explained to us how the people of Chios had always welcomed refugees. He was referring to those who came from Turkey to Greece following the 1923 population exchange. The population exchange caused Muslim Greeks to be displaced to Turkey and Turkish Orthodox Greeks to Greece. It created two million refugees dividing the wider region along ethnic and religious lines. 40,000 of these refugees were Anatolian Greeks. They made their way to Chios from Çeşme. Travelling in boats across the Aegean, they took the same journey as refugees today (Hirschon 2003). The wholesaler, like many other of Chios' current 52,000 residents, traced his life through that displacement.

This narrative for care was not only laid down in sea passages and family stories, but also in the walls of the city. Once registered by FRONTEX (the EU border force) and the Greek police, men, women and children were asked to move to the main UNHCR camp at Souda. Here the old castle battlements provided temporary dwelling for hundreds of people, just as it had for Anatolian Greeks 100 years before. In this way, through the sea, personal history and masonry the wholesaler traced a narrative of care for the new arrivals.



Figure 3: UNHCR Souda Camp and Wall

These narratives of care were intertwined with tales of loss in which refugees were also located. In 1881 an earthquake devastated Chios, and this was central to a local narration of tragedy, that also included five centuries of Ottoman dominion; the ethnic cleansing of Orthodox Greeks following the 1923 population exchange; a potential, but yet to materialise, Turkish naval invasion; and, the current 'refugee crisis'. These stories informed national and racial ideologies, bifurcations of 'us' and 'them': the Greek civilisation overrun by barbarians; the Orthodox Greeks slaughtered by Muslim Turks (forgetting similar Greek crimes); and in the context of the 'war on terror' (so laden with anti-Muslim and xenoracisms) the vulnerability of Greek culture to the now alien values of the Islamic East.

The coding of loss on these terms was used to make sense of the downward turn in the tourist economy, central to the economic viability of the island. Reeling from Euro-zone austerity programmes and negative media reports on the 'refugee crisis', this all-important industry was in decline. But it became the visible presence of migrants on the island and the (much exaggerated) detritus they left on the shore – caused by the shedding of wet clothes and ill-functioning lifejackets – that became the focus for economic concerns.

This racial scapegoating placed out of reach a popular structural analysis of the relationship between hardship in Greece and the wars in central Asia and the Middle East that were displacing millions of people. It hid the ways in which the cruelties of austerity foisted on

ordinary Greeks post-2008 financial crisis, were part of the same global configuration of power that forced many refugees from their homes. It further hid the structural racisms that connected the cruelties that ordinary Greeks and refugees shared. The stereotyping of Greeks as lazy and incompetent by central European media legitimised their abandonment, while associating central Europe with integrity and industry. In Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, anti-Muslim racism reduced human plurality to the sign of the terrorist, permitting killing while inuring the European frontier.

Just as local Greeks mixed narratives for care and cruelty to make sense of the 'refugee crisis' so too did international volunteers. These people, mainly from Europe and North America, oriented care through their own histories. Teachers, social workers and environmentalists extended the welfarism they learned at home, to Chios. In so doing, they de-privatised care, returning it to an inter-human relation but at the same time, they adopted paternalistic and colonial stances. As Mooten reminds us, this kind of welfarism is often "a caring relationship... imbued with domination, responsibility and historical mission" (Mooten 2015, 8).

Many international volunteers had been motivated by the image of Alan Kurdi who died leaving Bodrum, Turkey for Kos, Greece on 2nd September 2015. The image of his lifeless frame carried by a Turkish policeman spurred humanitarian sentiment across the West (Papailias 2018). That picture of a male official carrying a child's insensible body created a media framing of security, protection and vulnerability of sufficient magnitude to motivate hundreds of people to leave their daily routines and head to the island. Through these means, dominant tropes of patriarchal care (and its failure) were mobilised as too were racial registers. Kurdi's lighter skin and young age qualified his humanity and victimhood. A few months before, the *Independent* had reported on darker skinned African adults being placed at the bottom of boats so that their optics did not deny them pity when they arrived on Lampedusa (Dearden 2015).

These narratives showed how on Chios, fragments of time were being pieced together to make sense of the unfolding 'refugee crisis' – a compendium of re-enactments, not linear stories, whose meeting points provided the basis for general understandings about care but also cruelty. Splintered narratives of negation were gathered to define the contemporary Other (always also a negation of the self). Their telling denied otherwise shared struggles

and hid the culpability of the powerful. These cruelties co-existed with narratives of care available through the same history. Here, narratives of care and cruelty intertwined, such that the besieging other was also the childlike victim; the lived memory of loss also the locus of care to Others that suffered loss. Within this, autonomous narratives of care were also evident. Their strands were not of terminal negation but composed from the minor textures of generosity to, and solidarity with, Others. In this way, they persisted as vital resources to local people amid the spiralling, racially designated negativity, providing the vernacular basis for on-going acts of relation and responsibility.

Boat and beaches

Beach rescue, the registration centre and the sharing of food were other sites through which the tensions between care and cruelty on the island could be understood.

Beach rescue on Chios was the principle responsibility of the Cliff Team.^v The Cliff Team was a group of coast guards and volunteers trained in sea rescue. The Cliff Team placed lookouts at strategic points along the coast, and used cars headlights to mark safe landing places. Like lighthouses these beacons helped incoming boats navigate away from the rocks, and when they reached shallow water, volunteers would wade into the sea from the beach and help people ashore.

Some of this was spectacular. There were tales of endurance. The young men who watched for days and nights at the cliffs edge garnered local fame. Their independence, solitary stationing and motorbikes fed myths of masculinity and heroism. International volunteers' Facebook pages became adorned with images of rescued brown people, heightening the media spectacle and receiving commendations back home. Indeed, it was a truism among many volunteers that you didn't really understand the unfolding human plight until you had encountered it in the winter sea.

Yet still, alongside these presentations, many ordinary people risked their lives for people they did not know. Nothing made that verification of humanity starker than the contrasting commandments of FRONTEX and the Greek police. They, in accordance with European Commission directives, categorised the boat people differently. In response to the efforts of volunteers, these authorities effectively ushered hundreds of people on to the rocks and potentially their deaths by banning the use of car headlights on the coast. They further

commanded volunteers and townspeople not to enter the sea to help refugees to land. This was enforced by frequent coastline patrols and by the threat of prosecution under anti-smuggling legislation. When that threat was not a sufficient deterrent, the Commission pushed for an interpretation of European law which meant volunteers could be prosecuted under harsher human trafficking legislation. That contained the perversely ironic charge of cruelty to other humans.

The cruelty of those actions can only be apprehended in a context in which forcibly displaced people were not deemed fully human. Penned in the duplicitous language of human rights, the European Commission's "Draft Council Conclusions on Migrant Smuggling" (Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2016) stipulated the necessity of such action for the regularisation and management of refugees, and went so far as to state that it was necessary to improve their lives.

The context for that drafting was New Year's Eve 2016 in Cologne, Germany where news had emerged of recently arrived migrants attacking women during the evening's festivities. The ensuing moral panic had fed extreme-right discourses already gathering after similar reports in Sweden. When Cologne Mayor, Henriette Reker defined the perpetrators as "monstrous" she played the illiberalism and bestial sexuality of migrant men against the feminised white western liberalism they were violating (BBC 2016b).^{vi} That in turn implied the wider vulnerability of Europe's liberal political body to uncivilised hoards. This was the context in which the "Draft Council Conclusions on Migrant Smuggling" was written. Clinging to liberalism in the midst of authoritarianism, the inflammatory language of monstrosity was replaced in the document with the humanitarian lexicons of help, capacity and management, but the inhumanity of forcibly displaced people remained, as did the rocks of the Aegean.

The coast of Chios was then a frontier for the development of care and cruelty in Europe. As racist narratives permeated humanitarian legislation and practice, killing was sanctioned at sea through the language of human rights. Contingently, transgressive acts of care were banned. The criminalisation of international volunteers aimed to fracture solidarities and facilitate command and rule (Fanon 1991). But here too, care acted autonomously. Although sometimes drawing on welfarist and colonial modes, it was also characterised by collectives of strangers risking their lives for Others. This transgressed individualist and racist

designations, and did so when the European border regime was mandating death.

Registration centre

If on the coast the visceral proximity of death to life made clear the struggle between cruelty and care, on the rest of the island the professionalised routines of humanitarianism made these distinctions less easily defined.

Having arrived at the beach, the travellers made a short journey by bus to Tabakika, the registration centre. Established by UNHCR at the end of 2015 and run by the Norwegian Refugee Council, Tabakika was housed in an abandoned leather factory. Patio heaters had been installed and broken windows covered with black plastic to minimise cold draughts. Rest was possible and the heaters allowed arrivals to dry clothing and sometimes family photos (the few possessions they carried). Although better than the dire and unhealthy conditions of other sites, it was still the bare minimum necessary for human habitation.

Volunteers worked in the 'boutique' – a misnamed plywood cubicle in Tabakika that served as a distribution point for donated clothes. It was here that volunteers sorted and then distributed hundreds of items of clothing a day. Coats, head scarves, footwear and undergarments were organised from incoming donations and provided to the refugees. It was here too that volunteers rubbed the feet of a small child swollen by cold, and rummaged hopefully through numerous boxes to find the correct size of men's shoes. Here many conversations were held and milk was given to babies.

Refugees cared for each other. Micro-managed, depoliticised and categorised as items in a logistical flow, displaced people of different nationalities, ethnicities and genders formed bonds of solidarity which mitigated the growing claim on them as 'bare life'. One Syrian man helped another find footwear. From the Balkans and Germany, information on safe routes was sent and received by mobile phone and shared with others. When a Syrian family was robbed, money was collected and donated from the assembled. In one case, a Syrian woman stood a day and night in the boutique translating clothes requests from the refugees to volunteers. A family she met on route cared for her two children. In this way, refugees and volunteers moved out of their private spheres to act towards each other beyond their designation as nationally and ethically different.

In close proximity to these acts of care were practices of cruelty. The journeys to Chios had not been easy. In addition to losing family at sea, many had fled war and were sharing space with opposing political factions. As Assad supporters passed pictures of men armed with machine guns around, a Syrian man complained. He was being re-traumatised and was asking for care, but the paternalistic and colonial determinant of all refugees as similarly and homogeneously vulnerable meant that he was not heard. Among the gathered NGOs, there was no opening for such detailed work.

The mechanisms that did exist focused on the management of the collective body. Tabakika was where the asylum system began. First, refugees queued to register and make their asylum case to FRONTEX and the Greek police. If they could prove they were Syrian or Iranian they were provisionally accepted for resettlement in central Europe. If not, they were denied, told to cease their journeys and appeal. With many documents lost in war or at sea, and with Afghanis and Iraqis trying understandably to pass as Iranian or Syrian, the process was rather arbitrary – five minutes, a flick of a pen and you had been determined.

This process was managed by numbers and wristbands that were marked to record whether refugees had registered, visited the boutique, received a sleeping bag or foil sheet, and when they were to be processed to the main camp. Posited as politically neutral practices, they were anything but. Through these practices people were reduced from humans, to *infrahumans*, to categories, for management. On arrival at the registration centre, refugees were offered *either* a sleeping-bag *or* a foil sheet. The choice was recorded on their wristbands. Many opted for the later because it was lighter and easier to travel with. As the night drew in they realised their mistake. Sleeping bags were better for the low temperatures. When they asked to swap they were turned away. Cold and tired they were left to endure a sleepless night at just above zero degrees Celsius. The accountancy system, which designated them not as humans but units in a logistical flow, meant their error was irreversible.

In this way, the registration centre saw racialised boundaries partially deconstructed as people moved beyond their privately, ethnically and nationally defined selves. Here there was kindness, mutuality and degrees of reflection but these were pressed against a machine that categorised and processed with great efficiency and at impressive speed. Marked and assigned to the island's different camps, bonds of care, that need time to develop, were

routinely broken. But amid this, there was little animosity between the travellers. They were collectivised in their struggle. They still had hope. The borders were open and a better life lay ahead. Having survived the crossing, the worst was over. Amidst all the negation there was, at that moment, optimism.

Sharing food

Independent of the registration centre's accountancy system was the volunteer-led food infrastructure comprised of the Greek Solidarity Kitchen, the Swiss Anarchist kitchen and the People's Street Kitchen. My partner and I worked at the People's Street Kitchen.

Food cooked in the People's Street Kitchen was handed out to refugees from the backs of volunteers' cars. Volunteers and recipients understood this not as catering but as sharing food, and as such as an act of care. Time and thought had been invested by volunteers in the preparation of the meals – a process that started the day before with recipes, sourcing ingredients from around the town, preparation of the stock and then on the day chopping and cooking the final ingredients. Unlike the logistics of the registration centre, the sharing of food was a gift that contained more than nutrition. It contained care, and the act of giving generated reciprocity from its recipients, intimated through friendly gesticulations and kind words – hands on hearts, slight embraces and scraps of Farsi, Arabic and English.

These acts threatened the mandate of the Greek police and as such they intimidated those involved by banning food distribution from the registration centre and camps. This forced the provision of food to external areas – such as parking areas and access roads – and thereby denied its availability to the elderly, young children, the injured, unwell or disabled – that is to say the most vulnerable people. It also impacted on women who were the main carers of these vulnerable groups. The police deemed these policies necessary to avoid a rat infestation, although no one had seen any rats. Indeed, I would speculate that the police cared little about the proximity of rats to refugees. If they did, it was odd to show that concern by denying cold and hungry people food. More likely was that they mobilised a discourse of hygiene to disrupt the transgressive potential of care.

Other more convoluted disruptions to care were also unfolding. At the beginning of 2016, an NGO called The German Connection arrived on Chios. They brought with them a transit van and festival style kitchen trailer branded with their logo. These vehicles made the

distribution of food easier. However, they also altered the exchange, denying the gift and implementing a commercial and capitalised transaction. Although not their intention, the branding of the vehicle, and its industrial capacity turned acts of care from ordinary people into catering by a corporate body. This alienated people from each other, recasting reciprocity as service to a client. Furthermore, the distribution of food from the kitchen trailer elevated the soup servers above the people they were feeding, reducing the possibility for intimacy and introducing a kind of colonial verticality that compounded the benevolence of the act. Sharing food then become catering, and affirmation became dispassion. Hungry refugees were forced into lines, pushing person-to-person to receive food. German Connection volunteers responded spontaneously to this bustle by taking on crowd control roles – donning high-vis vests and assuming the somatic norms of security guards.

These examples highlight the ways in which different forms of giving food corresponded with different possibilities for care and cruelty. Similar to the beaches, the police compounded cruelty by disrupting transgressive acts of solidarity generated by sharing food. The horizontal, informal and interpersonal dimensions of volunteer-led distribution made it recognisable as a gift that could be reciprocated. It was an exchange not just of food but of care that validated all involved as human. This was in contrast to the actions of The German Connection which through a commercial presentation, vertical spatial arrangement and security practices situated refugees as clients, victims, and unspecified and disorderly masses.

City centre to camp

At the end of January 2016, the Hotspot Programme was announced (European Commission 2016). The programme sought to create a network of refugee accommodation facilities across southern Europe. On Chios, a site called VIAL was the designated location. As volunteers, we were informed that this location was being prepared and that it was being discussed in the town hall. VIAL was subsequently opened and the transferal of the refugee population from some city centre camps began.

This development drew stark attention to the colonial-spatial dimensions of care and cruelty on the island. Close to the town centre, the original camps ensured new arrivals were folded into everyday urban life, albeit for a few days. They were free to come and go, could

purchase goods from local shops, walk in the streets, and stay, if they so wished. This quotidian incorporation made their presence less remarkable and mitigated against the street level racism seen on the neighbouring island of Samos. The civilian geography also provided protection. While the status of asylum seeker, in the political context sketched above, meant they could not count on the legal protection of any state, they had the protection of the townspeople. Here, while they could be and were treated cruelly, they could not be acted towards with impunity.

The Hotspot Programme dismantled this topography of care. On Chios, the proposed hotspot site was on the footprint of an abandoned factory called VIAL, located outside the town and close to the centre of the island. Although refugees were initially free to come and go, the remote location of the site made this difficult. Indeed, that was the point. The relative inaccessibility of the site was justified through the need to reduce racial tensions in the town. However, rather than alleviate xenophobic attitudes, it confirmed by separation that the refugees were dangerous. Negation again fed negation, and the 'open' status of the facility quickly became 'closed' and fortified; protected and managed by the Greek military under the supervision of the Greek police. At this point, public accountability was cut, and media and volunteers refused access.

The militarisation, denial of free movement and the prevention of public oversight gave VIAL historically identifiable characteristics. The people detained there – some of whom had fled war and arbitrary incarceration – equated it with a prison (Smith 2016). But it had more in common with a camp. The facility was not punishing a crime. It was indefinitely containing and controlling a racially depoliticised population in the context of on-going war through the "temporary and extraordinary measures" invoked by the European Council (European Council 2016, 1). Its existence on these terms meant normal provision for human wellbeing was not deemed necessary. There were widespread reports of violence towards its occupants, no water, maggots in the food, and testimony of advanced malnourishment among occupants. This finally resulted in a protest in which the detainees forced the gates back open.

The founding of VIAL demonstrated the ways in which cruelty and care were spatial. Whereas the city, with its accountability, porosity, heterogeneity, everyday custom and movement provided a civilian environment which precluded impunity and facilitated care,

the detention centre with its unaccountability, impenetrability, racial exclusivity, security and stasis provided an incubator for excessive cruelty. Formed within the law (not outside it), this was not an arrangement that the contained population consented too. They did not accept their designation on these terms. They refused to abide it.

Conclusion

With the luxury of time not available to refugees or volunteers on Chios that winter, this paper has provided reflection on, and analysis of, the transgressive potential of care in the context of Europe's prevailing cruelties. The paper shows that cruelty on Chios was deeply rooted in colonial, racial and modern Europe, and that it was unevenly laced through narratives, practices, legislation, bureaucracy and geography. It argues that care was intertwined with cruelty, but also that care was autonomous, distinguishable from, and vital beyond, cruelty's presiding negation.

To explore these dynamics, the essay has been organised as a journey – a format that some will find unconventional but which best addresses the volunteers' and refugees' quotidian and multiple encounters with cruelty and care on the island. The paper takes theory seriously but holds it lightly, foregrounding the narrative of the island and the journeys within it. If readers follow the essay through they will find a story of Chios; a sustained engagement with modernity, colonialism, capitalism and racism; and, an analysis of history, narrative, space, bureaucracy, law and social practice informed by feminist and postcolonial thought.

This approach avoids slippage into the kind of over-specialisation that hinders appreciation of the multiple and interlocking dimensions of cruelty, and of the plural and transformative capacities of care. It too avoids a parochial analysis, so whilst this is a story of Chios, Chios is not presented as unique or peripheral but central to understanding the current predicaments of Europe.

In more detail, the paper has shown how the expansive and terminal cruelties of Europe, need to be understood in the context of neoliberal social and economic policy, war and fortification; and, how in this context parochial narratives of belonging are established through starker designation of outsiders. This is not a singular formation, but rather one in which local contexts determine the weight of prevailing racist affinities. On Chios, Central

European designations of otherness (variously refugees, Muslims, darker skinned people and southern Europeans) find correspondence with the local Other (Turks, Ottomans, Muslims, refugees and the uncivilised).

These narratives are embedded within “extraordinary” European legislation as they are practiced in policing, militarisation, bureaucracy and security, all of which should be understood as having agency in compounding cruelty, even as they sometimes purport to be for humanitarianism. These forms of cruelty are both banal and excessive, they are found in the registration centre, so that they can be present in the camp. Ultimately, at their various levels they function to break common bonds of humanity, mutuality and solidarity through appeals to race and fundamental human difference.

As Europe’s storm of progress blows sour it is vital that we identify, evaluate and act against these cruelties. Austerity is removing capitalism’s myth of meritocracy from those Europeans for which it was made. A dangerous void is opening up and its most available salve comes in tighter racial definition and protection, and a deeper and more virulent refinement of those who must be kept out. This is a damaging and unsustainable pact and one that will only be satiated by more negation and more death.

But rather than develop this argument alone. This essay has also provided discussion of how, and in what conditions, autonomous acts of care might move beyond the racial and colonial determinants of contemporary Europe. As has been stressed, on Chios, cruelty was too fast and care too fleeting for its transgressive potential to be fully realised, but it was nevertheless evident. Although intertwined and re-signified in cruelty, autonomous strands of care were available and active. This is important, because in contemporary Europe we will not find an ethics of care fully formed, but we can observe its persistence, engaging with it as a living and learning resource. In this way, as we continue to identify what racial modernity is and how it works, we can also know its limits and work towards alternative social arrangements.

To this end, reflection on racial, colonial, patriarchal and modern forms of power; mobilising narratives of care; seeing yourself in others; refusing consent to negation; becoming responsible to others; organising horizontally (socially and spatially) on the basis of reciprocity, mutuality and fellow humanity; taking time; and, advocating for heterogeneous

social space, are important resources from which we have much to learn. The scope for an ethics of care is wide reaching and transformative. It has the capacity to remake a mutual society, but it is also painstaking and slow. None of this will stop the cruelty, but care is key to the on-going struggle against it and to the reconsolidation of humanity beyond it.

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ⁱⁱ For more extensive background on European border control and sea-crossings please see (De Genova 2017).

ⁱⁱⁱ This essay draws on my experience as a volunteer on Chios in January 2016 where I worked in the People's Street Kitchen, distributed food to various city centre sites, and sorted and distributed clothing in the registration centre. Some additional material, for example on the development of the Hotspot programme, was collected during a second period of volunteering in the summer of 2017.

^{iv} The designation of humans and infra-humans through racial modernity and colonialism is established in (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2003).

^v Some names have been changed.

^{vi} As did satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (BBC 2016a).

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